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ABSTRACT

The contents of this paper are organized into four sections. The first or introductory section discusses the pattern of containment of the black population in Lansing, its effect on neighborhood schools, the history and policies of the Lansing Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the goals of the Education Committee of the Lansing Branch NAACP. The second section deals with the identification and documentation of educational inequities; topics discussed include: policy statements by the Education Committee as well as by the Lansing Board of Education made in the 1960s, treatment of minorities in library and textbooks, a March 1963 Conference Workshop for Teachers, the Main Street School -- several times a center of controversy in the 1960s, and three position papers that required research and the formulation of positions for approval by the Executive Committee of the NAACP, and, subsequently, by the general membership. Section three on initiating policy changes, discusses 'the Search for a Superintendent', and the report of the West Side Educational Facilities Study, completed in February, 1972. The final section focuses on events leading to the recall of five members of the nine member Board of Education. (Author/JM)

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COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY EFFORTS LEADING TO EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN THE LANSING SCHOOL DISTRICT, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION

The economy of the capitol city of Lansing, Michigan relies for the most part upon three major institutions: 1) the State government complex, 2) Michigan State University in East Lansing, and 3) the Oldsmobile Division of the General Motors Corporation and related automotive industries such as the Fisher Body plant. Until the recent recession, Lansing enjoyed an unusually high rate of employment. As State capitol, the city houses a variety of home offices and headquarters for various business concerns, organizations, and companies and industries that might manufacture products elsewhere.

Lansing was not engulfed in the various migratory waves that swept the country during the forties, the World War II years. In 1950 there were only 2,979 blacks in a total population of 92,129. By 1960 blacks constituted 6,745 persons out of a total population of 107,807. In ten years the population ratio had seen an increase of the black population from 1 black in every 30 persons in 1950, to 1 black in every 14 persons in 1960.

Population trends among blacks prior to 1950 are documented by Rose Toomer Brunson's, A Study of the Migrant Negro Population in Lansing, Michigan During and Since World War II; by Joel Smith's, Analysis of Selected

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Characteristics of the Population of Lansing's Census Tracts; and by Jack Eaton's, An Exploratory Study of the Lincoln Center. These early studies documenting the pattern of containment of the black population in Lansing may be found at Michigan State University. The Eaton study was not only concerned with population trends but with the need for opportunities for the black population to participate in activities which contribute to the development of democratic leadership, responsible citizenship, and more satisfying personal adjustment.

The pattern of containment is certainly one that is familiar to many northern communities. However, in this instance, it is particularly significant because it existed despite the relatively small percentage the black population represented as compared to the total population.

With population increases, those neighborhoods that were once racially mixed began to form a new pattern. The effects of real estate practices, gentlemen's agreements, restrictive covenants, and policies of lending institutions served to contain the black group in the fifties. Later the I-496 highway and the expansion of both Oldsmobile and the State complex created other pockets of blacks and extended the predominately black census tracts. But it was first in 1950 that blacks became a conspicuous minority group by virtue of their residential containment although numbering less than 3,000 persons in the entire city.

The effect on the neighborhood schools was marked. In some of the smaller units, particularly the elementary schools, the black student grew from a conspicuous minority to a sizable majority. By 1960 blacks represented only 6.3% of the total population, yet Lansing had three virtually all-black schools defined as 90%+ and one exceeding 70%. One junior high school contained approximately 90% of all black junior high school students and

one senior high school some 95% of all black senior high school students.

One of the 90% elementary schools, the Lincoln School, was constructed in an area already serviced by two elementary schools. In subsequent years school zoning followed unusual patterns that served to contain blacks within the Lincoln School district. (It was often pointed out that the Lincoln School was the only elementary school in the city of Lansing not named the same as the street on which it is located.)

As the population increased in the area, the Lincoln School could no longer service the majority of black elementary students in Lansing and their percentages increased substantially at Kalamazoo, Michigan Avenue, and Main Street Schools. Under extreme pressure from white parents who had children in the Main Street School, the Board of Education granted wholesale transfers and prepared to change boundaries to zone these children to another "white" elementary school. As these actions and proposed actions became general knowledge in the community, many blacks and whites expressed their distaste for such obvious attempts to maintain the status quo. The previously granted transfers were rescinded and new transfers were granted for "health" reasons upon presentation of a medical certificate signed by any licensed physician. Some black parents transferred their children to more heterogeneous schools upon presentation of a physician's statement while privately and publicly criticizing this type of transfer.

The NAACP

The Lansing Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was established on April 14, 1919, five years after the birth of the National Association. The programs and projects promulgated by the Lansing Branch might be described as more moderate than militant. It was not until 1962 following the impetus provided by the Supreme Court decision

of 1954 and the southern sit-ins, that picketing and public marches were used by the Branch to dramatize specific issues.

The committee structure was and continues to be the fundamental work unit of the Branch. Committees direct attention to specific problem areas, study, and recommend possible solutions to the Executive Committee for Branch action. During the 57 year history of the Lansing Branch NAACP, the most impressive achievements can be traced to the following committees: Education, Housing, Labor, and/or Legal Redress. The Branch has a very active Youth Branch comprised of junior and senior high school students who report their activities to the parent body.

Long-range goals are directed toward the elimination of segregation in housing, education, and employment. More immediate goals are directed at improving situations as they exist. An attempt is made to use all reasonable means to achieve objectives through research, public hearings, publications, and other established (Establishment) modes of enlisting broad community support for NAACP positions.

The Lansing Branch had been an active critic of all practices (covert or overt) that promoted discrimination in the public schools of Lansing. Despite the fact that as late as 1949, the secretary of the Board of Education stated that Negroes would not be hired as teachers in the Lansing school system, no legal procedures were entered into by the NAACP on behalf of parents or students in Lansing until October of 1966. The Legal Redress Committee of the Branch had successfully concluded legal action in several cases involving racial discrimination in domains other than public education. Continuing to negotiate, the NAACP was promised in 1950 that the first black teacher would be hired and this was accomplished in 1951.

In 1963 the Education Committee of the Lansing Branch NAACP was charged to:

1) seek to eliminate segregation and other discriminatory practices in public education;

2) study local educational conditions affecting minority groups;

3) investigate the public school system and school zoning;

4) familiarize itself with textbook material therefrom which is racially derogatory;

5) seek to stimulate school attendance;

6) keep informed of school conditions and strive to correct abuses where found;

7) aim to be a center of popular education on the race question and on the work of the Association.

The following two sections of this paper concerning Equal Educational Opportunity are: "The Identification and Documentation of Educational Inequities," and "Initiating Policy Changes."

IDENTIFICATION AND DOCUMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUITIES

The Education Committee of the NAACP was reorganized in January of 1963. Fortunately, the Lansing community had begun to attract persons with considerable educational skills who were willing to contribute their knowledge toward the identification, research, and documentation of racial discrimination in the public schools. More importantly, recommendation to eliminate segregation and other discriminatory practices were formulated and presented to the Board of Education, the School Administration, and other community organizations via meetings, reports, position papers, and public forums.

Policy Statement

Beginning in April of 1963, the Education Committee gave oral and written presentations to the Lansing Board of Education and the school

Administration requesting adoption of a policy statement that would insure all children an equal opportunity in the public schools. An extensively documented position paper, A Report on the Effect that School Segregation Has on Minority Group Achievement to the Lansing Branch of the NAACP for the School Board and the School Administration of the Lansing Public School System, was presented. Three major recommendations in the report were:

"1. That the Lansing Board of Education make a formal statement of policy favoring the elimination of school segregation wherever it exists regardless of the cause.

2. That the School Board and the School Administration make Saginaw Street the northern boundary, and Mount Hope the southern boundary of the West Junior High School district for the coming year.

3. That the School Board for a citizens' committee to study the long range aspects of the problem of integration and advise the Board at regular intervals with regard to ways of implementing an ongoing program."

Some other areas of importance were:

The integration of teachers into the school system with regard to placement and promotion;

The importance for Negro youth to see Negro teachers in various positions, and the equal importance for majority group children to see Negro teachers in the hope that this exposure might dispel and discourage some of the negative images and stereotypes that often develop;

At least one Negro teacher placed in every school in the system.

Other recommendations were in the areas of Vocational and Educational guidance; work-study programs as related to Negro students; inequalities in playground equipment and facilities; standards of achievement differences between various schools; and differences in curriculum and physical facilities.

A resolution was drafted and circulated by the Education Committee urging the adoption by the Board of Education of a policy statement relative to de facto segregation and offering the support of the undersigned in any feasible plan developed to effectuate the policy. Several hundred

signatures were obtained in addition to letters of support from other organizations. This tangible evidence of community support was transmitted to the Board of Education.

Various organizations, including the NAACP, sponsored an Institute on Human Rights attended by several Board of Education members and School Administrators at Michigan State University in May of 1964. Several presentors noted that there had never been any recorded statement against discrimination nor formal recognition that de facto segregation existed in the Lansing public schools by Board members or administrators.

On June 4, 1964, the Lansing Board of Education unanimously adopted a statement of Equal Educational Opportunity. Several organizations and individuals joined the NAACP in commending the Board for its recognition that de facto segregation existed in Lansing. The criticism that was formally presented by the Education Committee was based on the Board's unreadiness to acknowledge that there were methods within its realm of authority that could and should be used to relieve the pattern of segregation in the Lansing public schools. A portion of the NAACP letter to the Board stated:

> "It is difficult to reconcile the Board's recognition of an "obligation to exercise leadership" in dealing with community problems with the bland pronouncement that de facto segregation is caused by "factors beyond the control of the Board of Education" and that it plans to continue the establishment of attendance areas on a geographical basis. This is a disappointing statement to those of us who have looked to the Board of Education and the School Administration for dynamic leadership in this area."

Although the policy statement of the Lansing Board of Education did not contain present or future plans to eliminate segregated schools, it did represent an acknowledgement of the fact that some of Lansing's schools were segregated. The Education Committee of the NAACP had petitioned for some

15 months for the Board to recognize and record the fact that there was an imbalance of minority group pupils in some areas of the school district due to the traditional practice of establishing attendance areas on a geographical basis.

The Board of Education appointed a Citizens' Advisory Committee on Educational Opportunity as had been recommended in the 1963 NAACP presentation. The Citizens' Committee report (presented to the Board in July of 1966) recommended that the policy statement be updated in order to conform to their recommendations for transporting pupils as a more desirable alternative to segregated "neighborhood schools." The policy was amended in February of 1967.

Finally, in June of 1967, Racial Balance in the Lansing School District: A Statement of Principles, said that, "this Board of Education believes that the objectives of this school district must be to eliminate segregated elementary schools and to achieve racial balance in the secondary schools." The Board recognized that the community needed to be equally concerned and involved in providing the leadership and resourcefulness necessary toward the achievement of racial balance and equal educational opportunity.

Four years and three months of sustained effort by the NAACP Education Committee resulted in the adoption of a position by the Board of Education that provided the framework for meaningful solutions to the problems resultant from racial imbalance in the Lansing public schools.

Simultaneously with the effort to secure the adoption of a policy statement, other projects and positions were presented to the Board of Education and to the community by the tirelessly dedicated NAACP Education Committee.

Treatment of Minorities in Library and Textbooks

The Education Committee received several complaints in the fall of 1963 regarding some of the racially derogatory reading materials in the classrooms and libraries of elementary schools in Lansing. The Education Committee prepared a Bibliography of Books by and for Negroes and made it available to all library administrative personnel.

In response to a request from the NAACP that the Administration give serious consideration to maintaining a collection of books in the libraries that did not place members of the Negro race in an unfavorable light, a committee of school personnel was appointed by the Administration. The work of this committee was reflected in the favorable comments from parents, students, and teachers when obviously biased and racially derogatory reading materials were discontinued in the school libraries.

On April 16, 1964, the Lansing Board of Education adopted the Michigan Department of Public Instruction publication, The Treatment of Minority Groups in Textbooks, as a "building philosophy" for the Lansing school system.

During the summer, a small group of lay and professional persons, including representatives from the NAACP Education Committee, met with Administrative personnel to explore methods for improving the aspirational levels of minority group youth. Incorporation of Negro songs, poems, and plays into the curriculum as well as encouraging participation in extra curricular activities were suggested as motivational factors to be used by teachers and administrators. A report to the Superintendent was compiled outlining the programs and concepts explored at these meetings.

Conference Workshop for Teachers

In March of 1963 the desirability of a program to improve teacher

understanding of minority youth was outlined by the Education Committee and presented at a meeting with the Administration. In response, the Lansing schools arranged a five week workshop beginning in February of 1964 conducted by a team of guest lecturers on the "Culturally Different Child." The response as indicated by the large numbers of teachers and administrators in attendance was excellent. Workshops using local resource persons, teachers, administrators, and lay persons became an ongoing method of improving human relations in the Lansing schools.

The Education Committee gave public expression and recognition to those individual teachers in the Lansing public school system who had done outstanding creative work in the field of human relations.

Main Street School

Early in 1963 representatives of the school Administration requested the Executive Board of the Main Street School PTA to make an immediate decision as to whether or not mobile units were to be added to the Main Street School campus to relieve overcrowding as opposed to an alternative plan of transporting students to nearby white elementary schools with available space. The Executive Board voted to add mobile units. The NAACP was advised of this decision by several parents in the school district who were concerned because of the limited discussion in an atmosphere of haste, although a crowded situation had existed for some time and census projections had indicated increasing congestion in the school service area.

Main Street School had been a center of controversy before. It had changed from a predominately white school to a predominately black school in less than five years, losing a principal and several teachers to transfers. An attempt to change boundaries by zoning some black students to Lincoln School was resisted by parents and opposed by several organizations

including the NAACP. Wholesale transfers were granted to white students wishing to leave the attendance area, again protests were registered and transfers were rescinded. Finally, "medical" transfers were obtained upon the signature of a physician. As white students transferred, the resulting racial composition was 95% black.

The Education Committee accumulated data to support the fact of increasing de facto segregation in Main, Kalamazoo, and Michigan Avenue Schools. A series of meetings were arranged with the Main Street PTA Board to acquaint them with some of the facts of increasing segregation in Lansing schools. As a result, the Executive Board decided to review the use of mobile units at the school. This action was later supported at the PTA general meeting by majority vote.

A committee was appointed by the Executive Board of the PTA to meet with the school Administration to discourage additional mobile units from being added to Main Street to relieve overcrowded conditions. The Main Street School Committee continued to meet and in the fall of 1964 some students were bused to nearby schools. This was the beginning of one-way busing of elementary school pupils that was to continue until 1976.

	Negro Enrollment	Total Enrollment
June 1964		
Main Street School	425	448
April 1, 1966		
Main Street School	319	371
Kalamazoo Street School	442	557
Michigan Avenue School	278	390
October 1, 1966		
Main Street School	303	312
Kalamazoo Street School + 110 bused out	364	414
Michigan Avenue School + 80 bused out	286	362

Position Papers

The Education Committee developed a series of papers on other educational

concerns in the Lansing schools such as the generally poor academic record of the majority of the black and Spanish speaking youth in the secondary schools. Ethnic census data in junior high schools supported extreme racial imbalance in Enriched Instruction, .02% black; in Modified Instruction (80-90 IQ), 25% black; Special Education Instruction (50-84 IQ), 21% black. It was suggested that the Administration undertake a comparative analysis of curriculum offerings, special education programs, type and condition of school facilities, academic performance and teacher turnover of schools having a high percentage of minority students with other schools in the Lansing system.

Papers were developed that detailed the growing concerns of Tracking, Ability Grouping, and the Misuse of IQ Scores. The papers discussed the use of these procedures in contributing to subtle forms of discrimination. As an example: teacher recommendations from the elementary schools were a determinant in the placing of students in Enriched Instruction at the junior high school level. Some of the predominately black elementary schools did not have Enriched courses of study much less identification of students for such programs, if indeed such identification was objective. It was constantly stressed that compensatory programs should <u>accompany</u> and not <u>substitute</u> for greater desegregation.

Three papers were developed that required research and the formulation of positions for approval by the Executive Committee of the NAACP and, subsequently, by the general membership:

<u>Position Paper No. 1 - The Future of West Junior High School</u>

Only one half of the students attending West Junior High School in 1964 resided in the schools' attendance area. The remainder were bused in from outlying, recently annexed, school districts - or were tuition students from

areas outside the district. The four predominately black elementary schools were feeder schools for West Junior High School.

Position Paper I recommended that the school be designated as a Central Administration Building and that present and planned junior high schools be designated to accommodate those students residing in the district to avoid the inevitable demise of racial balance at West Junior.

The Lansing Board of Education eventually concurred with this recommendation due in part to pressures from parents whose children were being bused into West Junior and in part to recommendations related to racial balance in all secondary schools made by the Board-appointed "Citizens' Advisory Committee on Educational Opportunity."

Position Paper No. 2 - Elementary Achievement in Selected Lansing Schools

In January of 1966 the Education Committee undertook the development of a second position paper which would focus attention on the need to eradicate de facto segregated schools at the elementary level. Other educators worked on design and methodology for the research study with the Education Committee and the Lansing school Administration. In addition to specific recommendations based on research presented to the Board of Education by the NAACP, the Lansing schools published the resultant Elementary Achievement Study Report in June of 1967.

Position Paper No. 3 - Busing in the Lansing Public Schools

This paper documented the failure to provide free transportation for students assigned to other junior high schools following the closing of West Junior High School. Recommendations for gaining easier access to educational services during and after school, by students and parents, were presented to the Board of Education.

INITIATING POLICY CHANGES

With their presentation of Racial Balance in the Lansing School District: A Statement of Principles on June 1, 1967, the Board of Education affirmed their intent to assume leadership in facing the problems confronting urban public schools. The last paragraph of that document stated:

> "It is the position of this Board of Education that in the interest of social justice and of children and youth, improved racial balance in our schools and true equality of educational opportunity must be achieved. There is no more urgent business before the schools and the people of Lansing today."

The Lansing junior high schools had been desegregated without opposition. The plan to achieve greater racial balance between the city's three public high schools was restrained by a court order after the opening of school in the fall of 1966. The court order was issued after a group of citizens brought suit contesting the validity of cross busing to achieve racial balance. The NAACP filed a legal brief on behalf of the Board of Education. The restraint was lifted and the senior high school plan went into effect.

The tide of the civil rights movement was running high. This was supported by the mood of the community and the country, the momentum of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and a healthy economy that afforded increased opportunities for all.

Still distant were ominous signs of an ebb tide propelled by the Vietnamese war, the slow trickle of middle and upper income families to suburbia, the domestic unrest of rising expectations unrealized, and the results of an economy reeling under inflationary pressures.

In 1969, it looked as if we could make it all the way home. Many members of the Education Committee of the NAACP that had been so active as critics of the system from 1963 to 1968 had become integrated into the system. The former chairman became the first black elected to the Board of

Education and received more votes than any other official in that election, including the mayor. Other members of the Committee had, or were, soon to assume such positions as:

First black principal of a Lansing senior high school
Administrator in the Denver, Colorado School System
U.S. Financial Aid Director to Nigeria
Consultant in Personnel for the Lansing School District
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Assistant Superintendent, Ann Arbor School System
Director of Elementary Education, Lansing School District
Assistant Principal for Adult Education, Lansing School District
Foreman, Oldsmobile Division of General Motors
Assistant Personnel Director, Michigan State University

In September of 1969, the Lansing Board of Education began drafting plans to eliminate de facto segregation in elementary schools based upon the recommendations of the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Educational Opportunity presented in 1966. The Lincoln School (referred to in the Introduction) had been phased out prior to the report. The proposed plan would phase out the predominately black Kalamazoo and Michigan Avenue Schools with students bused to other schools. As mentioned earlier, some busing was already in progress.

The concept of one-way busing and the removal of two additional schools from the black community came under sharp attack from some community groups, including the NAACP. The Board appointed a second Citizens' Advisory Committee to recommend plans to desegregate elementary schools on a more equitable basis. A West Side Educational Facilities Study Committee was appointed and specifically charged to investigate means of providing more educational opportunities for students in the predominately black area. This committee would report its findings to the larger, city-wide Citizens' Committee.

The Search for a Superintendent

The imminent retirement of the Superintendent necessitated the devotion

of time and attention to the search for a new superintendent by the Board of Education. It was the opinion of the Board that the successful development and implementation of the final phase of desegregation of the Lansing school system would rely to a most important degree upon the chief administrator's disposition toward equality and the quality of the educational experience for all students in the district. Criteria used in the search for a superintendent was developed to include this requirement.

In the light of subsequent events, it is of historical importance to note that the Board was unanimous in the selection of a superintendent whom they believed might best accomplish this goal. The new Superintendent assumed the post July 1, 1971.

During the winter of 1971, the Board of Education initiated a series of open meetings at elementary schools throughout the city in advance of the report of the Citizens' Committee. These meetings were counter productive for creating a climate of acceptance of elementary school desegregation. No specific plans could be explained since none had been adopted. Discussion in the absence of a specific proposal allowed the basic fear of desegregation to grow unchecked. By February of 1972, community sentiment against elementary desegregation caused several appointees to the Citizens' Committee to become inactive, some resigned. The PTA Council was active in recruiting replacements so that every elementary school area might be represented on the Committee.

The West Side Educational Focilities Study Committee completed its report on February 24, 1972. The Committee called for the construction of a new West Side facility to replace the 57 year-old Michigan Avenue School. It emphasized that the recommendation to replace Michigan Avenue School should not be interpreted as a lessening of its commitment to the implementation of

a district-wide desegregation plan.

The remainder of this paper will focus on events leading to the recall of five (5) members of the nine (9) member Board of Education. Yet, rather than leave the impression that there were no other happenings during 1971-72 other than actions and reactions related to desegregation, some of the accomplishments of the Board of Education and of the school Administration during this period are listed:

Creation of an Academic Interest Center offering advanced and special studies for high school students
Establishment of viable Alternative Educational Programs
Expansion of the Vocational Educational Program
Established a Reentry Program for school drop outs
Planned campus expansion for the Beekman Center for handicapped students
Initiated planning for a new elementary school that would integrate the physically handicapped student into a regular school situation
Adopted a policy of Non-Discrimination in Employment for Contractors and Sub-Contractors
Established the Right to Read Program
Developed the Triple T Program (MSU/Lansing School District)
Began decentralization of Administrative functions - accountability at the building level
Developed and documented GOALS for the Lansing School District
Extensive modernization of older buildings
Campaign and passage of school millage
Worked on legislation against Constitutional change permitting aid to parochial schools
Increased minority teachers, black and Chicano
Reviewed hiring and recruitment practices, upgraded minority staff
Appointed a black Board Attorney
Increased blacks in key Central Administrative positions from 0 to 2

The President of the United States, Richard M. Nixon, delivered the following statement over major television and radio networks on March 16, 1972:

"Tonight I want to talk to you about one of the most difficult issues of our time - the issue of busing.

Across the nation in the North, East, West and South, states, cities, and local school districts have been torn apart in debate over this issue.

My own position is well known. I am opposed to busing for the purpose of achieving racial balance in our schools. I have spoken out against busing scores of times over many years.

I believe that most Americans, white and black, share that view.

What we need now is not just speaking out against more busing, but action to stop it. Above all, we need to stop it in the right way - in a way that will provide better education for every child in America in a desegregated school system.

The reason action is so urgent is because of a number of recent decisions of the lower Federal Courts. Those courts have gone too far, in some cases beyond the requirements laid down by the Supreme Court, in ordering massive busing to achieve racial balance.

The decisions have left in their wake confusion and contradiction in the law; anger, fear and turmoil in local communities; and worst of all, agonizing concern among hundreds of thousands of parents for the education and safety of their children who have been forced by court order to be bused miles away from their neighborhood schools.

There are many who believe that a Constitutional amendment is the only way to deal with this problem ....(too long).... This means that hundreds of thousands of school children will be bused away from their neighborhood schools in the next school year with no hope for relief. What we need is action now - not action two, three, or four years from now."

The text of the President's statement was printed in newspapers the following day.

The last of 21 public hearings prior to the receipt of the report of the Citizens' Committee was held on April 17. It was becoming apparent that what had appeared as unanimity by Board of Education members in decisions leading to the desegregation of elementary schools had begun to dissolve into irresoluteness. Three members suggested postponing all decisions until further study.

The long awaited Report of the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Educational Opportunity was presented to the Board of Education on April 20, 1972. The Resolution to establish the committee was adopted in March of 1971, and the first meeting of the committee was held in October.

The report was printed in its entirety as a Sunday supplement in a local newspaper on April 23, 1972. The supplement contained an announcement of

the time and place for six public hearings (May 1 - 10) to provide citizens full opportunity to discuss the report before any action would be taken by the Board.

Three plans were submitted by a majority of the Committee; and a fourth, as a minority plan. The minority report recommended that the Board not take any action on the issue of forced busing until the Federal Courts had resolved the issue. The other three plans shared the same technique of clustering schools and transporting pupils where necessary. They differed in configurations, estimated cost, and the numbers of students to be transported. The Committee found that 29 of Lansing's 48 elementary schools could be considered segregated. The recommendation of the West Side Education Facilities Ad Hoc Study Committee had been adopted and included in the report (the construction of a new elementary school to replace Michigan Avenue). The Committee identified 15 additional areas that would further equalize educational opportunity for all pupils and enhance their opportunity for achievement.

Petitions for the recall of six of the nine Board members were circulated throughout the district. The "Citizens for Neighborhood Schools" (CNS), a coalition of parents opposed to busing students to achieve racial balance, spearheaded the drive. Petitions were not circularized for the three Board members who were perceived as favoring "neighborhood" schools.

The Board of Education requested the Superintendent to draft a plan that would phase in desegregation over more than one school year, a plan within the financial resources available in the district at that time, and a plan that would include supportive services to insure the quality of the educational experience.

Finally, a plan that seemed to have the agreement of the majority of the

Board was presented as a resolution at a regularly scheduled Board meeting on June 1, 1972. The Resolution stated the intent to consider the plan for adoption on June 15, following a public hearing to be held on June 7. (This would be the 28th public hearing on elementary school desegregation.)

The plan that the Board was to consider is outlined as follows:

1) Beginning in September, 1972, the implementation of two cluster schools that would involve eight (8) elementary schools: four (4) in each cluster;

2) Immediate renovation of the Michigan Avenue School to be included in the cluster and to remain open until replaced by a new facility;

3) Development of educational plans and specifications for a new West-Side elementary school facility with the goal of completing construction before September, 1975;

4) Beginning in September, 1973, implementation of an additional cluster involving four (4) additional schools;

5) During the 1974-75 school year, conduct complete demographic studies of the school district and, on the basis of these studies, develop further cluster-school plans to address racial imbalance problems that exist at that time;

6) Beginning in September, 1975, implement other cluster-school plans as necessary to eliminate any racial imbalance then existing; included in the plans shall be the opening of the new West-Side elementary facility as a basis for cluster-school plan development.

Other important components were:

Staff members would be selected from those willing to be involved in the program;

The cluster would be treated as a single school for purposes of program planning, program development, building autonomy, community involvement, community committees, PTA, etc.;

Staff organization and support services would be differentiated to provide various resources for individualizing instruction. Multi-ethnic, multi-cultural materials would be developed for classroom use.

On June 13, 1972, recall petitions for each of six Board members were filed with the Secretary of the Board of Education who, as clerk for the Board, was in the unusual position of receiving petitions for her own recall.

Actually, the Board President received them for the Secretary, and the Secretary received the President's. A previous attempt had been made to file the petitions with the Intermediate School District, but determination was made that this action was the legal responsibility of the Lansing School District.

The validation process was to be completed within 30 days of receipt of the petitions. Determination of the number of valid signatures was based upon a percentage of the votes cast for governor in 1970 in the five Townships and the City of Lansing that comprised the Lansing School District. The number of valid signatures was determined to be 11,261 for each of the six persons named.

As the Board gathered on the evening of June 15 in preparation for the vote to adopt the plan as submitted in resolution form at the previous meeting, it was served with a Civil Action Summons that called for:

1) a Temporary Order of Injunction
2) a Preliminary Order of Injunction
3) a Permanent Injunction
4) a Mandatory Injunction

This Summons ordered the Board to absolutely desist and refrain from implementation of any action upon the adoption of the busing plan as indicated in the June 1, 1972 Resolution.

Action on the Resolution was postponed. The Board Attorney was asked to seek relief from the injunction. The Ingham County circuit court judge who had issued the injunction was out of town for an indefinite period of time and no date could be set in circuit court for the hearing. On June 19, 1972, the Board Attorney filed a petition answering summons for relief in the United States District Court for the Western District of Michigan, Southern Division. Relief was granted and the injunction was lifted.

The Board legally called a Special Meeting for noon on June 29. The plan was adopted by five (5) yes votes.

The Citizens for Neighborhood Schools were notified on July 8 that there were insufficient valid signatures for the recall. Additional petitions were filed on July 18 against only the five persons who had voted to adopt the plan at the Special Meeting on June 29. No further petitions were submitted for the sixth person who voted no on the plan.

According to State statues, the Board of Education must set a date for a recall vote within 10 days of the validation of petitions. Statues also state that the election shall be held at the same time as other special or regular elections, if such an election is scheduled within 90 days of the time the election is called for. Validation was completed on August 17. The presidential election scheduled for Tuesday, November 7, was within 90 days and was the date announced by the Board of Education for the recall vote.

In late September, a group known as Citizens Acting for Responsible Education for Lansing (CARE) was organized in support of the Board members facing recall. On October 17, 1972, the NAACP sought one injunction to halt the scheduled recall vote and another to prevent current and future Board members from rescinding or altering the four-year desegregation plan adopted June 29. The United States District Judge, Noel P. Fox, refused to block the November 7 recall election. He stipulated, however, that he would retain jurisdiction over any future litigation involving the Lansing Board and its desegregation plan.

A local newspaper article concerning the November 7 vote was correct in the assessment that the only surprise was that the margin was not greater. Removal was favored by about 55 percent of the voters, although individual margins varied. Voters in 22 percincts, primarily those on the West Side,

opposed the recall of all five school officials.

The Board of Education was left without a majority membership to conduct the business of the school district. The Governor appointed replacements to serve until an election could be scheduled for January 11.

The Citizens for Neighborhood School's entire slate of five candidates won election. One of the first actions at the February 1 meeting (the first meeting of the newly constituted Board) was to rescind the Equal Educational Opportunity Policy. At the second meeting, the Board voted to rescind the "cluster plan" at the end of the school year, June 30, 1973.

The Lansing Branch NAACP filed a lawsuit before U.S. District Judge, Noel P. Fox, seeking reinstatement of the elementary cluster-desegregation plan. Judge Fox ruled that the new school Board could not repeal the elementary school integration plan put into effect by the previous Board and that the Board must also put into effect in the fall of 1973 the second phase of the plan involving an additional five schools. The U.S. Sixth District Court of Appeals affirmed the ruling on August 10.

Pledging that they were not "giving up the fight" to end busing and restore neighborhood schools, Lansing School Board members directed their special attorney (the Board appointed black attorney, former President of the NAACP, disqualified himself from participating in any litigation regarding this matter) to initiate procedures required to bring their desegregation suit before the Grand Rapids Federal District Court for a full trial.

The judge on several occasions attempted to get the NAACP and the school Board to save money and time spent in litigation by developing compromise plans for desegregation. As late as October of 1975 following three years under court order to desegregate and being forced to keep the cluster, the

Board would not respond with a plan to integrate the new elementary facility proposed for the West Side.

On December 19, 1975, Judge Noel P. Fox of the United States District Court for the Western District of Michigan, Southern Division, found that the Lansing Board of Education, through its acts and omissions, had created and maintained a segregated, dual school system in violation of the Constitution and laws of the United States and of the Constitution of the State of Michigan.

Therefore, the decision stated, the Board was enjoined and restrained from giving any force or effect to the February 1, 1972 Resolutions revising the Policy Statement on Equal Educational Opportunity and rescinding the desegregation plan of June 29, 1972.

It was ordered that the cluster plan remain in effect until such further plans as the court orders or approves are conceived and adopted.

The Board was ordered to submit on or before March 1, 1976 plans which could be implemented in September, 1976 to remedy the Constitutional violations found in the case and to end racial isolation throughout the school system.

The Board published the text of the decision in a local newspaper on Wednesday, January 7, 1976. The intent to appeal the decision all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court had already been announced.

An indication of softening of community attitudes toward desegregation had appeared in the results of the April 7, 1975 school board election. Of three six-year term seats, two were won by candidates openly identified with the NAACP, the fight against the recall of the Lansing five, and advocacy of desegregated education. One, a black, was an active member of the NAACP Executive Board whom the Board of Education had refused to appoint

to a vacant seat because of affiliation with the NAACP, which was interpreted by the Board as "conflict of interest." The other winning candidate, a white, was a plaintiff in the original suit filed by the NAACP.

Since publication of Judge Fox's decision, the Board has called for open hearings on desegregation of elementary schools. The hearings have been poorly attended. More people were present to speak in favor of desegregation than against it. The heat and the emotion of the presidential election year of 1972 have drained away or at least simmered to a less active state. The opinion survey conducted for the Board of Education, Attitudes Toward the Cluster Plan in the Lansing, Michigan Public Schools, documents changes in community attitudes.

Observations

The original plan for the creation of two clusters, involving eight (8) elementary schools, was limited in scope and excluded the primary grades. It has been referred to by critics on both sides of the question as a compromise plan. To determine the validity of that assumption would require analysis beyond the scope of this paper. It was a plan that afforded sound educational benefits. It was a plan that enjoyed wide community support and the official endorsement of organizations such as:

West Side Neighborhood Association
League of Women Voters
PTA Council
NAACP
Lansing Ministerial Alliance
Lansing School's Educational Association
Michigan Civil Rights Commission
GAIN
Lansing-East Lansing Branch, American Association of University Women
Lansing Chamber of Commerce, Education Committee
U.A.W. Community Action Program Council
Greater Lansing Labor Council (AFL-CIO)
Lansing Council of Churches
The Lansing State Journal
WJIM-TV

The League of Women Voters of the Lansing, Michigan Area and the United States filed a brief to become amici curiae on behalf of the plaintiffs, the NAACP, et al., in their case against the Lansing Board of Education. Representatives of the League were active in attempting to gain community support.

The Lansing Labor Council spoke out against recall even though one of the leaders of the Citizens for Neighborhood Schools was a member of the Council.

The exodus to suburbia of many influential citizens who had supported the earlier decisions of the Board of Education leading toward desegregation became apparent when supporters were examined for voters. Many of the organizations that were supportive of desegregation were comprised of large numbers of persons who did not reside within the voting area of the Lansing School District. This comment is not intended to question the validity of the support, rather it is a commentary that the search for the good life is more often socio-economically exclusive than racially exclusive.

It is to the credit and to the future promise of the Lansing community that there has not been a black-white confrontation. The recalled Board members (four white and one black) had combined totals of 51 years as elected members of the Lansing Board of Education.

It is to the credit of the Superintendent, the school Administration, and to the teachers and principals of the Lansing School District that a climate fostering educational excellence prevails undeterred by the long legal tug-of-war.

When one speaks of sustained effort and continuity of effort toward the realization of the goals of a democratic society, it is of historical significance to note that the young attorney for the NAACP throughout the

current court litigation is the grandson of a founder of the Lansing Branch NAACP who served as its first secretary in 1919.